

Selecting the Right Reformer Springs

by Kathryn Coyle

For decades now students and teachers alike have been singing the praises of the Pilates method's ability to create health and vitality. Joe Pilates ingeniously created a system of movement that perfectly balances strength and stability. One of the ways that Pilates accomplishes this is through the use of [springs](#). At Peak Pilates® the manual indicates the ideal number of springs for each exercise to help create guidelines for the exercise.

The original [reformers](#) only had four springs one heavy, two medium and one light. It's pretty common for a reformer today to have five spring settings, although we never work with five springs at one time. The five spring reformers allow for more versatility since they have one heavy, two medium and two light. Our job as instructors is to meet students where they are and help them to progress.

Springs can provide assistance and resistance. Generally, lighter springs require more stability and more springs require greater peripheral strength. For the classical work there is an ideal balance of strength and stability for each exercise. If your manual says four springs that means 1 heavy (red), 2 medium (yellow) and one light (blue). If it's a two spring exercise that means 2 medium (yellow) outside springs. If your reformers are new the springs will be heavier. If you have a [PPS](#), [MVe](#) or [Fit](#) Reformer their springs are slightly heavier than the classical reformers so bear that in mind.

Although the ideal form of each exercise may not be appropriate for every client where they are today it does not mean that we should give up on the ideal. When I work with a

Pilates client who is weaker, then it naturally makes sense to reduce their spring setting on exercises that are recommended as having a four spring setting (footwork, the hundred, stomach massage round, etc.) to two medium and two light or even three springs (2 medium & 1 light). However as they improve you can work them to increase their springs until they reach the ideal. Start with doing only one of the footwork exercises with the full spring setting and continue to incrementally increase over time. You might also reduce a fit person's springs if they are not able to keep their powerhouse's engaged and are arching their back. However as their powerhouse strength and technique develop you can increase the spring load. I also meet plenty of students who while new to Pilates are fit and able to handle the ideal spring load right away.

Sometimes the ideal spring setting can feel too light like in the supine arm series. I often hear from new students, especially men and strong women, that it isn't heavy enough. This is because they are not able to activate the stabilizing muscles in their shoulder girdle therefore naturally it feels light for their global muscles. In this situation I do not add [springs](#) but reassure them it is an exercise to help strengthen their shoulder stabilizers and as they learn more about their powerhouse and smooth out their movement it may not feel like the hardest exercise but it won't be easy. Encourage them to focus on making smooth and even movements.

While it's important to make adjustments to your students spring setting to meet your student where they are never lose sight of the ideal. It may not happen today but it will happen 'tomorrow' provided you keep making incremental changes to their spring settings and guide your students to develop their technique.

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